

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA
SHREVEPORT DIVISION

MICHAEL D. ELLIS

CIVIL ACTION NO. 13-2502-P

VERSUS

JUDGE HICKS

DALE N. MONTGOMERY, II., ET AL.

MAGISTRATE JUDGE HORNSBY

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

In accordance with the standing order of this court, this matter was referred to the undersigned Magistrate Judge for review, report, and recommendation.

STATEMENT OF CLAIM

Before the court is a civil rights complaint filed by pro se plaintiff Michael D. Ellis (“Plaintiff”), pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. This complaint was received and filed in this court on August 16, 2013. Plaintiff is currently incarcerated at the Winn Correctional Center in Winnfield, Louisiana. He complains his civil rights were violated during his criminal trial proceedings. Plaintiff names District Attorney Charles Scott, Unknown Assistant District Attorney, Public Defender Dale N. Montgomery, and Unknown Parole Officer as defendants.

Plaintiff claims that on October 18, 2011, he and Siheda Elize were arrested and charged with possession with intent to distribute a schedule II. He claims Elize pleaded guilty to the charge.

Plaintiff claims his attorney Dale N. Montgomery failed to file a motion for speedy trial and a motion to quash. He claims Montgomery also failed to present incriminating evidence

against his co-defendant Elize. He claims Montgomery aided the Assistant District Attorney by not opposing his unlawful conduct and the proceedings. He claims Montgomery provided him with ineffective assistance of counsel because he failed to object or put forth a defense on his behalf.

Plaintiff claims Elize was on parole and her parole officer and the Assistant District Attorney compelled her to falsely testify against him. He claims the Assistant District Attorney showed a reckless disregard of the truth and maliciously prosecuted him. He claims the Assistant District Attorney ignored the fact that his co-defendant was the one found in possession of the drugs and had pleaded guilty to the charge. He claims he was wrongfully convicted for possessing the crack that his co-defendant alone possessed.

Accordingly, Plaintiff seeks to have his conviction reversed, his immediate release from incarceration, and monetary compensation.

LAW AND ANALYSIS

Heck Claim

Plaintiff claims he was wrongly convicted because of the actions of Defendants. Plaintiff is seeking monetary damages for an allegedly unconstitutional conviction and sentence. The United States Supreme Court held that in order to recover monetary compensation for an allegedly unconstitutional conviction or sentence or for "harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid," a prisoner must show that the conviction or sentence has been "reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination,

or called into question by a federal court's issuance of a writ of habeas." Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87, 114 S.Ct. 2364, 2372 (1994). Heck involved a civil rights claim brought by a state prisoner. The Court dismissed the Section 1983 suit until plaintiff could demonstrate that his conviction or sentence had been invalidated.

When a claim comes within the parameters of the Heck teachings, it is not cognizable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 so long as the validity of the conviction or sentence has not been called into question as defined therein, which requires dismissal of claims not meeting its preconditions for suit. See Johnson v. McElveen, 101 F.3d 423, 424 (5th Cir. 1996).

Plaintiff is seeking monetary damages for civil rights violations under Section 1983; therefore, he must prove his conviction or sentence have been invalidated. He has not met this precondition and his complaint must be dismissed until such time that he can demonstrate that his conviction or sentence have been invalidated.

Attorney Dale N. Montgomery, II.

Plaintiff claims his appointed attorney Dale N. Montgomery provided him ineffective assistance during his criminal proceedings. Section 1983 prescribes redress for conduct by any person who, under color of state law, acts to deprive another person of any right, privilege or immunity secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States. 42 U.S.C. § 1983. A plaintiff in a civil rights suit must show that the conduct complained of was committed by a person acting under color of state law. Neither privately obtained nor court appointed defense attorneys act under color of state law for purposes of Section 1983.

Both a retained and a court appointed attorney serve their client, the accused; they do not serve the state. They serve a private function for their client that follows from the very nature of the attorney-client relationship and for which no state office or authority are needed. Hence, neither a retained nor a court appointed attorney acts under color of state law and cannot be held liable under Section 1983. See Polk County v. Dodson, 454 U.S. 312 (1981); Ellison v. DeLa Rosa, 685 F.2d 959, 960 (5th Cir. 1982) (citing Polk County, *supra*); United States ex rel. Simmons v. Zibilich, 542 F.2d 259, 261 (5th Cir. 1976); Nelson v. Stratton, 469 F.2d 1155 (5th Cir. 1972); Richardson v. Fleming, 651 F.2d 366 (5th Cir. 1981); Mills v. Criminal District Court #3, 837 F.2d 677 (5th Cir. 1988)(citing Nelson, *supra*).

Accordingly, Plaintiff's civil rights claim against Dale N. Montgomery, II. should be dismissed as frivolous.

District Attorney Charles Scott and Unknown Assistant District Attorney

Plaintiff claims the Assistant District Plaintiff compelled his co-defendant to falsely testify against him. He claims the Assistant District Attorney showed a reckless disregard of the truth and maliciously prosecuted him. He claims the Assistant District Attorney ignored the fact that his co-defendant was the one found in possession of the drugs and had pleaded guilty to the charge. Plaintiff claims District Attorney Charles Scott is liable as supervisor for the actions of the Assistant District Attorney. Prosecutors have absolute immunity when acting in a quasi-judicial mode. Imbler v. Pachtman, 424 U.S. 409, 106 S.Ct. 984, 47 L.Ed.2d 128 (1976); Geter v. Fortenberry, 849 F.2d 1550 (5th Cir. 1988). The Fifth Circuit has repeatedly recognized the purpose of the immunity defense is to protect public

officials from undue interference with their duties and from disabling threats of liability. Geter, 849 F.2d at 1552. Absolute immunity is immunity from suit rather than from liability. Elliot v. Perez, 751 F.2d 1472 (5th Cir. 1985). The Fifth Circuit "has likewise accepted the premise that the protected official should be sheltered from trial and pre-trial preparation as well as liability." Id. at 1478.

The conduct challenged unequivocally falls within the authority of the assistant district attorney as quasi-judicial officer of the court and in the ordinary exercise of his quasi-judicial duties. Accordingly, Plaintiff's civil rights complaint against District Attorney Charles Scott and the Unknown Assistant District Attorney should be dismissed as frivolous.

Habeas Claim

Plaintiff alleges his conviction and sentence are illegal and seeks to have his conviction reversed and his immediate release from incarceration. Although Plaintiff submitted his claim on the standardized civil rights complaint form, it is incumbent upon this court to determine preliminarily whether the facts alleged establish a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 of the Civil Rights Act, or whether the claim is one which must be pursued initially in a habeas corpus proceeding. This determination is made by focusing on "the scope of relief actually sought." Alexander v. Ware, 417 F.2d 416, 419 (5th Cir. 1983); Serio v. Members of the La. State Bd. of Pardons, 821 F.2d 1112, 1117 (5th Cir. 1987).

When a claimant challenges the very fact or duration of his physical confinement and seeks an immediate release or speedier release from confinement as relief, he must pursue his claim through an application for writ of habeas corpus. See Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411

U.S. 475, 500, 93 S.Ct. 1827 (1973). In accordance with this guideline, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit adopted a "per se rule barring consideration of claims under [42 U.S.C.] § 1983 that directly or indirectly challenge the constitutionality of the state conviction or sentencing decision under which the claimant is currently confined." Serio, 821 F.2d at 1117 (citing Fulford v. Klein, 529 F.2d 377, 381 (5th Cir. 1976), adhered to en banc, 550 F.2d 342 (1977)). Plaintiff is challenging his conviction and sentence and his claim clearly falls within the strictures of this guideline.

However, habeas relief is unavailable to Plaintiff at this time. Although such relief is available to a person who is in custody "in violation of the Constitution or laws or treaties of the United States," 28 U.S.C. § 2254, the right to pursue habeas relief in federal court is not unqualified. It is well settled that a petitioner seeking federal habeas corpus relief cannot collaterally attack his state court conviction or sentence in federal court until he has exhausted all available state remedies. See 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1)(A); Rose v. Lundy, 455 U.S. 509 (1982); Minor v. Lucas, 697 F.2d 697 (5th Cir. 1983).

This requirement is not a jurisdictional bar, but a procedural one erected in the interest of comity to provide state courts first opportunity to pass upon and to correct alleged constitutional violations. See Picard v. Connor, 404 U.S. 270, 275 (1971); Rose v. Lundy, 455 U.S. 509 (1982). From the information provided in Petitioner's complaint, it does not appear that he has exhausted his available state remedies. Therefore, Plaintiff is not entitled to habeas relief at this time because he has failed to exhaust his state court remedies.

CONCLUSION

Because Plaintiff filed this proceeding in forma pauperis ("IFP"), if this court finds Plaintiff's complaint to be frivolous it may dismiss the complaint as such at any time, before or after service of process, and before or after answers have been filed. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e); Green v. McKaskle, 788 F.2d 1116, 1119 (5th Cir. 1986); Spears v. McCotter, 766 F.2d 179, 181 (5th Cir. 1985). District courts are vested with extremely broad discretion in making a determination of whether an IFP proceeding is frivolous and may dismiss a claim as frivolous if the IFP complaint lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact. See Hicks v. Garner, 69 F.3d 22 (5th Cir. 1995); Booker v. Koonce, 2 F.3d 114 (5th Cir. 1993); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 109 S.Ct. 1827 (1989).

Accordingly;

IT IS RECOMMENDED that Plaintiff's civil rights claims seeking monetary damages for his allegedly unconstitutional conviction and sentence be **DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE** as frivolous under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e) until such time as the Heck conditions are met. **IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED** that Plaintiff's civil rights claims against Dale N. Montgomery, II., District Attorney Charles Scott, and Unknown District Attorney be **DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE** as frivolous under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e). **IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED** that Plaintiff's request for habeas relief be **DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE** for failure to exhaust state court remedies.

OBJECTIONS

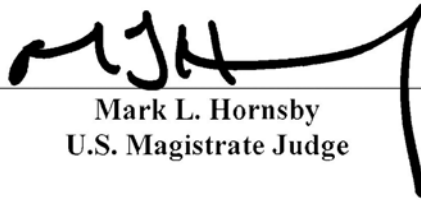
Under the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C) and Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b), parties

aggrieved by this recommendation have fourteen (14) days from service of this Report and Recommendation to file specific, written objections with the Clerk of Court, unless an extension of time is granted under Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(b). A party may respond to another party's objection within ten (10) days after being served with a copy thereof. Counsel are directed to furnish a courtesy copy of any objections or responses to the District Judge at the time of filing.

A party's failure to file written objections to the proposed findings, conclusions and recommendations set forth above, within fourteen (14) days after being served with a copy shall bar that party, except upon grounds of plain error, from attacking, on appeal, the proposed factual findings and legal conclusions that were accepted by the district court and that were not objected to by the aforementioned party. See Douglas v. U.S.A.A., 79 F.3d 1415 (5th Cir. 1996) (en banc).

An appeal may not be taken to the court of appeals from a final order in a proceeding under Section 2254 unless a circuit justice, circuit judge, or district judge issues a certificate of appealability. 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c); F.R.A.P. 22(b). Rule 11 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Proceedings for the U.S. District Courts requires the district court to issue or deny a certificate of appealability when it enters a final order adverse to the applicant. A certificate may issue only if the applicant has made a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right. Section 2253(c)(2). A party may, within **fourteen (14) days** from the date of this Report and Recommendation, file a memorandum that sets forth arguments on whether a certificate of appealability should issue.

THUS DONE AND SIGNED, in chambers, in Shreveport, Louisiana, on this 6th day
of May 2014.



Mark L. Hornsby
U.S. Magistrate Judge